

# Design and Conservation

## Cherwell District Council

### Design Advice

Application Number	15/01872/F
Applicant's Name	Mid Counties Cooperative Society
Application Type	Full
Location	26 High Street Kidlington
Case Officer	Bob Duxbury

**FULL - Erection of new buildings off Sterling Road Approach to contain 46 x 2 bedroom flats, conversion of offices above existing retail store to form 8 x 2 bedroom flats, and alterations to existing retail store. Construction of new accesses, car parking, service and turning areas and landscaping**

The development proposals are formed on a key corner of Kidlington's Centre, on the junction of the High Street and Forward Sterling Road. The site is currently composed of retail units, office accommodation and a car-park associated with the retail area.

The High Street has a varied character, made up of 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings of a range of forms. It is predominantly low rise at two storey, through steps up to three and four storeys in places. The area around Sterling Road Approach is highly varied in character. This area interfaces with the residential development on Sterling Road, the mix of one and two storey residential / commercial on Oxford Road. Immediately opposite the site is the single storey Royal Mail distribution centre, the fire station and Oxfordshire County Council offices which are three storey. While this area is very varied in its character, it clearly has a 'backland' relationship to the Village Centre and it is important that the hierarchy between these areas is maintained as part of the development process.

The applicants have pursued pre application advice for this site, where the principle of development in this area was accepted. Questions about the amount and scale of development were however raised and it is my view that these issues require further refinement to develop an acceptable scheme.

### Policy Context and Design Guidance

High standards of design are expected in development across the District. This approach is set out in Local and National Policy Guidance. The Cherwell Local Plan, Saved Policies, National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance emphasise the importance of good design and provide detailed guidance as to how good design should be assessed.

Good design is a key principle of the NPPF. Chapter 7 of the NPPF provides specific guidance on design and places great importance on the design of the built environment. This has been supplemented by the recently published Planning Practice Guidance (2014) and best practice guidance such as *By Design: Urban Design in the Planning System* (2000) and *Better Places to Live by Design* (2001). These documents provide guidance on the central urban design principles that underpin good design; including layout, form, materials and detailing.

### Local Plan 2015

The policy requirements set out ESD 16 of the Local Plan, provides clear guidance on the importance of high quality design which responds to the character of a place "*New development will be expected to complement and enhance the character of its setting through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design*". "*New development proposals should respect the traditional pattern of routes, spaces, blocks, plots, enclosures and the form, scale and massing of buildings*."

*Development should be designed to integrate with existing streets and public spaces, and buildings configured to create clearly designed active public frontages”*

#### Saved Policies Local Plan 2006

The saved policies from the 2006 adopted Local Plan also place emphasis on the way that design should respond to local character and context:

*C28 “Control will be exercised over all new development, including conversions and extensions, to ensure that the standards of layout, design and external appearance, including the choice of external – finish materials, are sympathetic to the character of the urban or rural context of that development. In sensitive areas such as conservations areas, the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and areas of high landscape value, development will be required to be of a high standard and the use of traditional local building materials will normally be required”.*

*C30 “Design control will be exercised to ensure (i)that new housing development is compatible with the appearance, character, layout, scale and density of existing dwellings in the vicinity”;*

#### Kidlington Masterplan

A village masterplan has been commissioned for the village. This is currently due for consultation later in the year. It is anticipated that a key element of the masterplan will be the future form and development of the Village Centre and it would be useful to have an update from the consultants to inform the Councils view.

#### Site Boundary

The development parcel includes the existing Cooperative store on Kidlington High Street and the backland area to the rear of the store which is currently used as customer parking. The north west boundary of the site backs onto the mixed use development on Oxford Road. The southern and eastern boundaries follow the edge of the public realm along Sterling Road Approach.

#### Housing Mix and Density

The development proposals are for two buildings. The existing cooperative building on the High Street would undergo significant remodelling, reducing the ground-floor retail footprint and introducing residential development above. A large scale apartment block is proposed on Sterling Road Approach. The total level of residential development amounts to 54 units on an area of 0.54HA. This gives a residential density of 100UHA which is a very intense use of a village site. When the configuration of the site is viewed as a whole, including the parking requirements and public realm it is clear that the amount of development is too much for this small site.

#### Layout, Scale and Massing

The layout plan is formed in two parts. The existing coop building is being significantly remodelled to the north of the site. Behind this, along Sterling Road Approach there is a substantial apartment block which runs the length of the street.

#### Remodelling of the existing Cooperative Building

The redevelopment of the Cooperative building offers the opportunity to improve the quality of the High Street. This is an important junction in the Village Centre and it is important that development takes the opportunity to improve the character of this area.

- The building is proposed to undergo significant remodelling, reducing its ground floor length by half and reconfiguring the massing of the upper floors to provide apartment accommodation.
- The proposals show three storeys of development and significant remodelling of the building. The building is set back from High Street which helps break down the scale. We

would recommend that a similar approach is taken to the upper storeys of development along Sterling Road Approach as well.

- The Council is looking for active frontages along the High Street and Sterling Road Approach and we are currently uncomfortable about how this is coordinated. I would recommend that there is a reconsideration of the ground floor uses. The location of the supermarket on the corner could be swapped with the travel agent. This would provide a more inviting, lighter space for the travel agent and help mitigate the issue of providing active frontage with a food store.
- The layout of apartments could be improved to give better light, aspect and amenity space.
- The rear of this building is currently poorly resolved and has a low quality design. The stair in particular is a clumsy addition. It is important that there is an attractive entrance to the building which is light and enticing. The cycle storage should be separated from this area, and greater thought given to how the stair well could become a feature that is well integrated with the public realm.

### New Apartment Buildings

The new apartment block could bring new uses to and extend the Town Centre. While we accept the principle of development of this area, it is important that development enhances the character and fits well with adjacent areas. It is recommended that substantial changes are made to the design for this to be achieved.

- The scale and length of the apartment block is just short of 80m and runs the majority of the length of Sterling Road Approach. The length and scale of this building are monumental and it risks overwhelming the character of the route.
- We would recommend that the building is broken down into two parts to help break down the form of the building. This should be combined with a reconsideration of the height of development.
- The development proposals are for a four storey building. This feels completely out of context with the surrounding area, which includes single storey buildings, and should be reconsidered.
- It is important that the scale of development in this area is less than the majority of development found on the High Street. This is important in order to retain the hierarchy between the spaces and the legibility of the village centre.
- I would recommend that the height is reduced to three storeys and the third storey is set back from the principal building line to reduce the impact.
- The layout of this building appears to reflect the geometry of the rear boundary and have little interaction with the geometry / character of Sterling Road Approach. While this approach allows car-parking and the public realm to the rear of the building to be lined up, it leads to an odd geometry along Sterling Road Approach, combined with a series of triangular spaces which provides the interface between the building and the street.

### Parking and Public Realm

It is expected that a development of this scale in the Village Centre would contribute to positive uplift of the public realm, alongside appropriate open amenity spaces for residents. The intensity of development on this site has led to a site configuration where there is little opportunity for positive landscape and public realm.

- The majority of the space left over from the building has been given over to car parking. This leaves little space for residents amenity space and parking is tight on the building. A reduction in the scale of the building and reduction in the number of units would help ease this issue.
- The space between the two buildings should be designed as an attractive area of public realm. This area is poorly organised, with access, parking, bin storage and service access, which combined with the massing and design issues associated with the rear of the Cooperative building further undermines the quality of development.

## Architectural Design

There are some fundamental issues which need to be addressed in this scheme, before an acceptable approach can be delivered. My comments have therefore not focused on the architectural detail of this scheme. The architectural design takes a polite modern approach which I feel is appropriate, given the range of styles found in the adjacent area and the development brief.

## Conclusions

**It is my view that the proposed development is too dense for the site. This has led to significant concerns around the scale and massing of development alongside public realm issues. The scale of development along Sterling Road Approach will confuse the relationship between this area and the High Street.**

**While the Council is comfortable with the principle of residential apartment development in this area, a substantial reduction in the number of units is required alongside significant changes to the design and massing of the building for the proposals to be acceptable.**

Officer	Clare Mitchell Design and Conservation Team Leader
Date	21 <sup>st</sup> January 2016
Other Information	It must be stressed that these comments cannot constitute a formal determination under the 'Town and Country Planning Act 1990', or the 'Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990' and that it contains only informal, officer advice, which cannot prejudice any subsequent decision of the Local Planning Authority.